

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

Healthy Helpers is a Citizenship/Character Education program designed to train fifth graders to plan and direct activities for Kindergarten children in physical education classes. The program, in its third year, was developed and organized cooperatively by the school's guidance counselor and physical education teacher to provide leadership opportunities for older students and positive role models for younger children. The practice is innovative in its pairing of fifth graders in teacher/leader roles with Kindergarten children, its use of physical education as the arena, and its collaboration between guidance counselor and physical education teacher.

Objectives of the program are:

- Students will demonstrate greater confidence and appropriate risk-taking in school-related tasks.
- Students will demonstrate a more positive attitude about school responsibilities and opportunities.
- Students will demonstrate an improvement in peer relations.

Program results have demonstrated that Healthy Helpers promotes high student achievement in the areas of citizenship and character education skills by fostering students' investment in the school community and enhancing the individual student's self-image to include "helper" and "responsible leader."

Four groups, of six students each, are formed throughout the school year as the result of classroom teacher input, collaborating teacher knowledge of students, and parental consultation and consent for program membership. Fifth grade students selected for this program come from regular education and learning disabled classrooms. During two "working lunch" periods, students are trained in leadership and the affective and core curriculum skills needed to lead Kindergarten children. Class management, safety precautions, transition behaviors, and interpersonal skills are discussed and modeled at the lunchtime training sessions. Student ideas for teaching skills through games and activities become the lesson plan for the next Kindergarten physical education class. Subsequent weekly lunches with the Healthy Helpers provide time for debriefing, planning, and practicing the introduction of new skills for the next class. Healthy Helpers are leaders in the Kindergarten physical education classes once a week for four weeks for 40 minutes each session.

At the conclusion of the four-week period, Healthy Helpers meet to celebrate their success and reflect on the experience. Photographs taken during their service and certificates of appreciation are distributed. Suggestions for changing or improving the program are solicited. The most common suggestion is "Make it longer!" A common answer to the question asking what they have learned about themselves is "I can help younger children learn." Another frequent answer is "I want to be a teacher when I grow up."

An unexpected benefit from the program has been its effect on students entering first grade from the Kindergarten classes who've had Healthy Helpers. The physical education staff reports that those children begin their first grade year already familiar with physical education class rules and procedures and are, therefore, more comfortable and ready to progress with the first grade program.

Throughout the school year, when help is needed in a gym class, these trained fifth grade students are called upon. Because students report that this status as Healthy Helpers is so important to them, the program is under expansion this school year (2001-2002) to include their use in other situations around the school, such as ushers for assemblies. Helpers receive a round of appreciative applause at our monthly character education assemblies, as their work exemplifies

those character traits (responsibility, respect, patience, caring, diligence, honesty, courage, cooperation, loyalty, and pride) which our extensive district character education program teaches.

In June, all of the fifth grade students who served as Healthy Helpers have a picnic-and-play time with the Kindergarten children. The Helpers quite naturally organize small groups for games or follow the little ones to the playground equipment, looking out for their safety. It is heart-warming to see a large fifth grader tenderly lifting a small five-year-old onto a swing and pushing ever so gently. It makes one smile to see a game of catch, with the older student showing the younger one how to grip a nerf football. In this time and in this place, it is "cool" to be kind, caring, and helpful.

2. List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addressed those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards

Standard 1: All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.

Healthy Helpers students are relied upon to report to the gym and lunch meetings on time. Each Helper is responsible for learning the names of his/her designated group of Kindergarten youngsters. The Helpers develop a compassionate leadership style with the younger children because they smile, show concern, offer help, and share feelings. Healthy Helpers learn by experience what it takes to plan and execute creative ideas to teach skills to young children. They see their own ideas put into practice and have the opportunity to evaluate and revise plans.

Standard 3: All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. When planning how to teach motor skills to young children, the fifth graders must recognize problems, brainstorm solutions, and decide on a best solution. The application of the solution may lead them to revisit the process and choose an alternate solution. For instance, when teaching the young children how to skip, the fifth graders thought of having relay races to demonstrate the new skill. When the children began to run the races, the fifth graders discovered that the younger children didn't know how to go to the rear of the line and wait for their next turn. They quickly stopped to problem-solve, then spent some time teaching the prerequisite skill.

Standard 4: All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

The twenty-four Healthy Helpers share ideas, work cooperatively, and help one another within their leadership group as they plan for the Kindergarten classes. In discussion, each must take turns, allow his/her ideas to be criticized or revised, and yield to others. In addition, each must show responsibility for any work he/she misses in the regular classroom. The importance of academic responsibility is reinforced by periodic checks with the classroom teacher during the time of service.

Standard 4: All students will apply safety principles. The first rule of physical education class is safety. When an activity or game idea is proposed, the first question posed is, "Is this safe for Kindergarten children?" During the class, fifth graders model safe practices. Then they watch for compliance with safety procedures by the younger children.

Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards

Standard 2.1: All students will learn health promotion and disease prevention concepts and health-enhancing behaviors. As safety is the first rule for physical education instruction, many of the activities and games suggested by the Healthy Helpers are examined carefully for risk of injury. Often it is the fifth graders who will suggest an injury-prevention strategy that will make the

activity safe. Careful consideration is also taken when planning activities as to developmental appropriateness for the younger children's muscles and bones.

Standard 2.2: All students will learn health-enhancing personal, interpersonal, and life skills. In the training for Healthy Helpers, students are caused to show empathy for Kindergarten children who are learning skills for the first time. They then practice ways to teach, correct, encourage, and communicate in a supportive, non-threatening way. Such phrases as, "I'll help you," "Maybe we can try together;" and "Would you like me to show you how?" are rehearsed.

Standard 2.5: All students will learn and apply movement concepts and skills that foster participation in physical activities throughout life. As the fifth grade students plan the activities and games for the Kindergarten children, they are caused to name the muscle groups or skills for which the activities are designed. When planning the warm-ups, care is taken to exercise the total body. The connection between beginning level skills and those skills needed by the fifth graders in their own advanced games is made routinely. In teaching the beginning skills to young children, the older children see the importance of learning step-by-step, trying, and then practicing for mastery.

Language Arts and Literacy Standards

Standard 3.1: All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences. Each of the Healthy Helpers has opportunities to lead the Kindergarten classes by speaking to the whole group, approximately 40 students. They are taught to speak slowly, clearly, and loudly to be understood. In addition, they think and practice saying directions in a way that can be understood by younger children.

During the Kindergarten physical education classes, Healthy Helpers direct small groups, using their speaking and listening skills.

In the lunchtime training and planning meetings, the Healthy Helpers participate in a discussion, with one person speaking at a time, sharing opinions, offering ideas, and responding to others.

Standard 3.2: All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources. In the training, Healthy Helpers are taught to listen to the feelings behind the statements sometimes given by Kindergarteners, such as "I can't," or "I don't want to." Active listening can lead them to hear fear or anxiety behind those statements, and an appropriate response of help or encouragement can follow.

3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

In a population increasingly diverse in ethnicity, economic status, and learning styles, students work to find commonalities and build positive self-images. Healthy Helpers meets the needs of those students for whom a leadership role brings out their best. It provides recognition among their peers, enhances self-image, and provides a real example of favorable character traits in action. For the younger children in the project, personal attention in physical education allows for growth in skill areas where developmental differences matter. To be known and cared for by an older student is both flattering and reassuring. For both older and younger children, the safe, nurturing environment in an unexpected venue allows for greater risk-taking and creativity, as the older children explore their own assets and abilities to share their knowledge and experience, while the younger children learn and try new skills.

Assessing the value of this experience is accomplished by a series of questionnaires.

Before the first training session, classroom teachers fill out a **Teacher Pre-Survey**. The teacher's perspective of the child's confidence in approaching academic tasks, attitude about school responsibilities and opportunities, and social involvement is recorded. A **Teacher Post-Survey** records changes in the same categories following the student's involvement in Healthy Helpers. A typical comment from a teacher on the post-survey reads, "D. has been in less trouble in my classroom. He has been looking forward to Monday mornings." From another teacher, it was written, "S. is showing a better attitude toward school activities and peers."

A **Student Questionnaire**, completed just after training, but before beginning the work with the Kindergarten children, asks the students to record anticipations, anxieties, and personal goals. Following the four-week experience, students fill out a second questionnaire, which encourages reflection on the experience and what they have learned about others and themselves. "I work well with others," wrote one student. Another recorded, "It made me think I want to be a teacher or a gym teacher some day."

A **Parent Questionnaire**, asking for observations and insights about the effect of Healthy Helpers, is sent home at the end of the four weeks. One parent wrote, "D. felt he had something special to offer others as both a person and for sports ability. He took his responsibility strongly, trying to live up to what a good helper should be. He was proud of his role and how well he fulfilled it."

A **Kindergarten Teacher Survey** solicits comments or suggestions about the experience from the younger students. Teachers report, "They liked the attention. They remember their Helper's name. They seem more confident and comfortable with school."

Debriefing sessions following each week's work allow the fifth graders to voice their feelings and opinions, as well as compliment each other on what they saw. Informal assessments of Healthy Helpers students occur throughout the year, as teachers share with staff the progress these students have made. Observations by staff in hallways, lunchrooms, at recess, and during dismissal occur continuously and often reflect on the Healthy Helpers experience as a force for change. The collected assessments are used to revise and improve the program, as well as to counsel and guide individual students.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

The key to replication of the Healthy Helpers program is collaboration. A guidance counselor and a physical education teacher, with the approval and support of administration, agree to plan, schedule, and promote such a program. Lunchtime meetings for training, debriefing, and planning can take place in the guidance office. Healthy Helpers activities take place in a gym or large open space. Time for collaborative planning between guidance counselor and physical education teacher occurs regularly. Materials and equipment are available through the regular physical education program. Photographs of participants enhance the program, but are not a requirement.

Any school interested in replicating this program is welcome to visit our school, speak to participants and directors of the program, and watch this program in action. The enthusiasm and pride shown by our responsible leaders inspires the continuation and spread of the Healthy Helpers practice.